

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

fredericknewspost.com Vol. 134 No. 170 6 sections

© 2017

“I was slapped. I was kicked. I was tortured ... I was soaked in blood. Blood all over.

— FANTA JAWARA, a Frederick resident who was held in a Gambian prison



Staff photos by Dan Gross

Fanta Jawara at her home in Frederick on Friday. A native of Gambia, she was arrested while visiting family and held in a Gambian prison for eight months. She returned to Frederick about a month ago.

‘I did not know that I would survive’

Frederick woman recounts life during her eight months in Gambian prison

By DANIELLE E. GAINES
dgaines@newspost.com

With an empty belly in a crowded Gambian jail cell, Fanta Jawara had moments — during sleepless nights and sweltering days — when she worried she wouldn’t survive.

The 46-year-old mother of two teenage girls from Frederick is a naturalized U.S. citizen. She returned to her country of birth for a three-week vacation last year. But during a tumultuous time in Gambia’s political history, she was caught up near a march led by her uncle, beaten, jailed and sentenced to three years in the country’s notorious Mile 2 prison. On the first night after her arrest, Jawara’s surroundings were almost unbelievable.

“The environment was not the environment that I was expecting. Yes. It’s a prison, but it’s a very terrible environment,” she said.

She was put in a cell, with murderers, drug dealers, “baby

dumpers,” bad people.

In a space as large as Jawara’s Frederick living room, the women in Mile 2 slept two to a twin mattress, four women each clumped under a single mosquito net. The bare mattresses laid on the bare floors. Without floor space, their clothing and belongings hung from bags attached to the ceiling and walls.

“It’s very small, congested,” Jawara said. “That night, I could not sleep.”

It was her first time sleeping under a mosquito net, she was squished with people she didn’t know — and she was next to the single, small, dank bathroom all of the women shared.



Fanta Jawara talks Friday about her life in Gambia.

A barred window opening on the splotchy green-painted exterior wall of the cell offered little breeze during the hot, rainy season when Jawara was held, but the opening beckoned mice, snakes and frogs inside.

Jawara has lasting scars dotting her forearms where ants would bite her in her sleep.

There were other hazards. She feared fights, or being snatched from bed in the middle of the night and taken to a separate facility where political pris-

oners were known to be tortured. “That was ringing in my mind every night that I would be picked up and taken ... to be tortured,” Jawara said. “I was praying to God: Let that not be me.”

The women were locked in at 5 p.m. And there they stayed until 8 a.m., breakfast time.

“The food? Forget it,” Jawara said, describing the balls of porridge cooked the day before and topped with new hot water the

(See **PRISON A5**)

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017 | THE FREDERICK NEWS-POST

FROM PAGE ONE | A5

Prison

(Continued from A1)

next morning. And even if the porridge was good, she'd seen cockroaches climb out of the flour bags, ensuring it would not go into her stomach.

"Honestly, I did not know that I would survive the eight months that I did," Jawara said.

After months of diplomatic maneuvering, impassioned pleas by family members, and a final historic vote by the Gambian people that cemented her release, Jawara is home in Frederick now, healing mentally and physically.

As Gambians look to rebuild the country they lovingly call "the smiling coast of Africa," Jawara and other former political prisoners in Gambia have started speaking about their ordeals.

How she got there

On April 16, near the nation's capital and just down the street from her family's home, Jawara was swept up and arrested as part of a crackdown against political protests.

Her uncle, Ousainou Darboe, a political opposition leader, was hosting a march down Kairaba Avenue — a major road that runs nearly to the ocean on one end and is a bustling business district near the Darboe family home, across from the American embassy.

Darboe and others were demanding the return of Gambian youth political activist Solo Sandeng, who was tortured to death after a demonstration demanding electoral reform ahead of the country's 2016 election.

A coalition of political parties banded together last year in opposition to the 22-year authoritarian rule of former President Yahya Jammeh. Jammeh assumed power in a bloodless 1994 coup that deposed Dawda Jawara, the grandfather of Fanta's husband, Ebrima. The elder Jawara had served as the country's first president since 1970, when Gambians won independence from the United Kingdom.

Jammeh ruled the country as a dictator, cracking down on civil servants, the media and political opponents through forced disappearances, torture and worse, according to Human Rights Watch.

On the day of the march, Fanta Jawara was on Kairaba Avenue at the same time as marchers, headed to the bank with fresh braids in her hair as she prepared for her trip back to the United States two days later. She was not marching, she said.

About a half-mile down the road from Darboe's home, police units joined the marcher's ranks from behind, and soon there was a barricade up front.

Cellphone videos show flashes of chaos after that. Gunshots and crying can be heard in the streets. Limbs of protesters and the batons of police can be seen flailing.

Jawara was caught up in it all.

"I was slapped. I was kicked. I was tortured," she said. "...I was soaked in blood. Blood all over. My blood and other people's."

Jawara could not see out of her left eye and she feared she would lose it. Her head throbbed. She'd been dragged by her braids and remembers seeing strands of them on the ground. A large section of skin was torn off her left thigh.

"Some of the pain you don't even notice. You just see the blood. You don't



Associated Press file photo

Political prisoners, including Fanta Jawara, front, arrive on Dec. 5 for their hearing at Gambia's supreme court in Banjul. They had been arrested in April 2016 after they took part in a peaceful demonstration and sentenced to three years in prison.



Associated Press file photo

Gambian President-elect Adama Barrow, center, walks after an Economic Community of West African States meeting on Dec. 13 in Serrekunda, Gambia. Behind the president's left shoulder, in white, is Ousainou Darboe, the country's new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Darboe is the uncle of Frederick resident Fanta Jawara. Both were held in 2016 as political prisoners in Gambia for nearly eight months.

know where the pain is coming from," she said. She saw her uncle — who she calls "Dad" — at the police building where they were both held for one night.

"He looked at me and said 'What are you doing here? Didn't I ask you guys to stay home?'" Fanta remembers. "I said 'I was not a part of this. I went to pick up money and I got arrested on the way home.'"

Darboe's head was split open and his shoulder was dislocated.

The next morning, the group of prisoners was led to a big truck.

"I said, 'Dad, where are they taking us?'" Fanta remembered.

He said, "I don't know. I don't know where they are taking us."

How she survived

Jawara would spend a total of 233 days in custody, and 231 nights at Mile 2, the country's central prison.

The days were monotonous. In the run-up to Gambia's presidential election, the prison's televisions and radios were taken away. Guards were not permitted to bring their cellphones to work. There was little news from the outside world.

"Sometimes you even lose track of time and day," Jawara said. "You get up in the morning, all you have to do is sit in one place."

There was a courtyard, but Jawara could reach both sides of the narrow space with her arms and the walls were so tall, you could not see the tops of the trees — just blank sky overhead. There was no air, as if a Tupperware cover were over the top of the walls.

As her wounds began to heal, Jawara would look to

of Frederick before she left for Gambia, said her nursing background helped her to try to maintain her health and that of other inmates too.

Women went to the infirmary for medical issues and often returned with the same pain pills they'd already been prescribed or with a medication that had nothing to do with their ailments, Jawara said.

"They were like overdosing themselves on pain pills," Jawara said. She had women bring her their full supplies of medications and she taught them how to properly take the medicine.

How she was freed

Jawara was arrested in April and sentenced in July to three years in prison.

The judge concluded that Jawara did not appear to be a part of the protest, but she also refused to give a defense in court and was therefore found guilty, according to documents forwarded by her husband, Ebrima.

As Jawara and others idled in prison cells, the country stewed as voters pushed for Jammeh's ouster.

Election Day was tense in the prison.

When the morning crew arrived the next day, the prisoners asked: "How are things?"

"We don't know," came the response.



Courtesy photo

Ebrima and Fanta Jawara bought brooms from a market to take to Fanta's former cellmates at the Mile 2 prison while she was free on bail.

beings, too, so they should be treated humanely," Minister Mai Ahmad Fatty said on the prison grounds last month.

Jawara is monitoring her uncle's health through news reports. After the election and his release, Darboe became the country's foreign minister.

She is still going to doctor's appointments herself. When she returned, Jawara learned that she had a ruptured membrane in her ear. She also still has tenderness under her eyes and strong headaches.

"I'm not yet back to my routine. But I think I'm working towards that. It's getting nice outside, so I need to get up and start," she said.

For now, Jawara is enjoying simple comforts of home: taking a shower where she can regulate the temperature of the water, boiling a kettle of tea when she wants. She is considering writing a book.

Jawara recently shared her story with Fatou Camara, a Gambian radio and television personality who was forced out of the country and her former job as Jammeh's press secretary after a falling-out. Camara, who runs a Gambian-focused news operation from the U.S., served time at Mile 2 before fleeing Gambia while released on bail.

"It was a very terrible experience," Camara said. She dealt with doing interviews with anyone who asked and starting her radio show.

"I talked it out," Camara said. She's moving back to Gambia in June, eager to see the country rebuild its spirit.

"Sometimes I say we need nationwide therapy. Because we've all been traumatized. I saw torture myself when I was arrested. And people have family members who were snatched at night, they never come back home," Camara said.

She said a recently established Truth and Reconciliation Commission will help the country heal, even as new mass graves are being discovered.

William Cecil Roberts, an anthropology professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland, has worked in Gambia since he served as a Peace Corps volunteer there in the early 1980s.

Roberts said one thing Gambia has going for it during this time of political transition is its small size, because Gambians generally see themselves as related and very close. The country is slightly less than twice the size of Delaware, with about 2 million people.

Roberts said people around the world — and especially in the U.S. where Gambians were brought to the Annapolis City Dock as slaves — should be engaged in rebuilding efforts.

"If we really think that history matters and that what our forebears have done matters, we should do whatever we can to support the Gambians," Roberts said.

As for Fanta, if you'd asked her while she was at Mile 2 if she'd ever go back to her birth country, she would have said no.

The family has a vacation home under construction in Sukuta, near the ocean; while in jail, she considered telling Ebrima to sell it.

"I said when I leave this country, I would never come back," Jawara said.

Now she thinks she will return someday.

"I'm very, very hopeful that they will bring Gambia back," she said.

Follow Danielle E. Gaines on Twitter: @danielleegaines.

What she looks forward to

Before she left Gambia, Fanta and Ebrima Jawara went to the prison to bring back medicine and brooms for the women who were still inside. Brooms, because the prisoners had to use the same unsanitary broom to clean the outdoors, bathroom and cell. She hopes other prison reforms will come to Gambia.

Gambia's new interior minister recently toured Mile 2 and said the conditions will no longer be tolerated.

"Prisoners are human

BOUND BY LOSS

After tragedies, a friendship

STORY BY DANIELLE E. GAINES › PHOTOS BY GRAHAM CULLEN

THEY MET IN PERSON

for the first time on an afternoon in November. For months before that, a kinship had been building over Facebook as they shared words of encouragement and sympathy.

But despite all the things that could have been said when they met in a Frederick coffee shop, there was ... silence.

An understanding, gentle, sorrowful silence.

"It's almost like we could just sit there in pain together ..." Patti Saylor recalled.

"And that was OK," Chrissi Lillard finished her sentence.

"It was OK that there wasn't conversation. It was just being in the presence of somebody else who knows how absolutely consuming the grief is from head to toe," Saylor said.

On the night of Jan. 12, 2013, Saylor's son, 26-year-old Ethan, died as he was being forcibly removed from a Frederick movie theater by three off-duty



Frederick County sheriff's deputies.

Less than three weeks later, on the night of Jan. 31, Madigan Grace and Sophie Paige Lillard, ages 3 and 6, died when their family's house outside Myersville caught fire. Chrissi and Jack Lillard, along with their daughters Morgan and Sadie, were briefly hospitalized after the fire.

From the moment the Saylor and Lillard families met tragedy, they also met the spotlight.

The death of Ethan, who had Down syndrome, has become a flashpoint for the

civil rights of developmentally disabled Americans and has led to hearings in Annapolis and Washington.

Community members first turned out by the hundreds to shower the Lillards with donations immediately after the fire and then performed thousands of random acts of kindness on Sophie's and Madigan's birthdays.

Patti Saylor and Chrissi Lillard and their families became names in

news stories or magazine articles they often didn't know were being written. At the same time, they struggled with the enormity of their grief.

"Our lives were paralleling," Saylor said.

And Facebook made their connection to one another instant.

"We were always in each others' presence," Saylor said. "Every morning, I would see what Chrissi was saying. Every night I would check. And she could see what was going on with me and comment.



TOP: Patti Saylor, left, and Chrissi Lillard became friends after the tragic deaths of their children, both of which occurred in January incidents in 2013.
OPPOSITE: They say goodbye after meeting in Baker Park



Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo

ABOVE: Sophie and Madigan Lillard. LEFT: Ethan Saylor

"It just allows you to be friends and support each other," Saylor said. "At a little bit of a distance, but not a distance in the heart."

GRIEF AND UNDERSTANDING

There was almost a sense of calm when the two mothers met in November.

"There were a lot of tears and a lot of just understanding and not feeling like we had to ... when you meet somebody, you don't want to overwhelm them with your grief," Lillard said. "It's very easy to become so consumed by your own grief that you don't really reflect on what somebody else is going through."

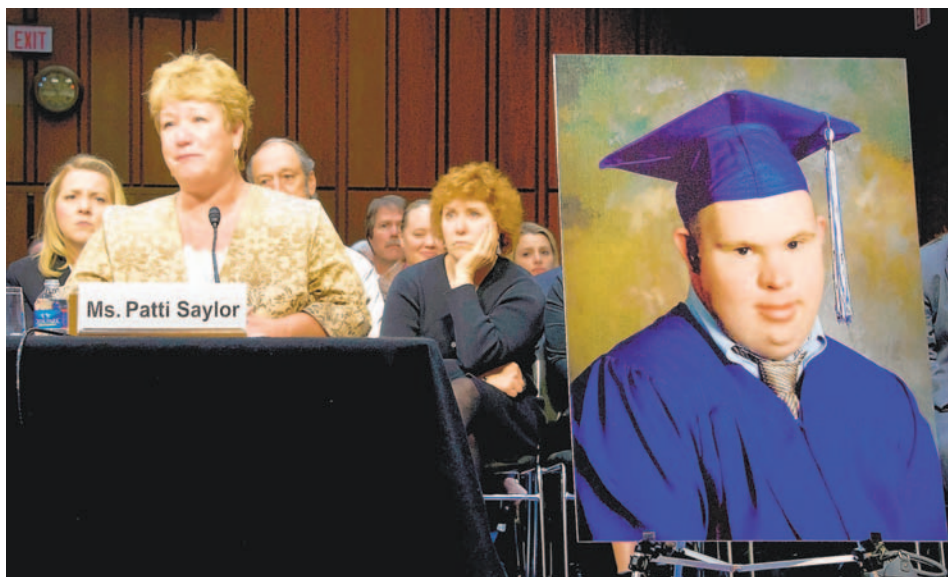
Both women know what it's like to be out, enjoying a perfectly great time with friends, and suddenly break down in tears.

"The triggers could be just anything," Saylor said. "Going to the grocery store is tremendously hard. Because where do mothers spend a lot of time with their kids? I might be in a particular section, and I'll just be crying my way down the aisle."

The glint of light bouncing off a pair of handcuffs can set Saylor on edge. The sounds of sirens or a helicopter, even during a stress-relieving run, prompts negative emotions for Lillard. Her family now lives in a rented house in northwest Frederick, unable to return to their fire damaged home.

Lillard and Saylor are dealing with what's known as "complicated grief," an intense and long-lasting form of grief parents sometimes experience with the death of child, a death that rocks the natural order of things.

According to the Center for Complicated Grief at Columbia



Staff file photo by Sam Yu

Patti Saylor, mother of Ethan Saylor shown in the photo on an easel, recounts the night he died to a congressional subcommittee in Washington at a hearing titled "Law Enforcement Responses to Disabled Americans: Promising Approaches for Protecting Public Safety."

University, the loss of a child can sever a parent's feeling of connection to the future and cause parents to feel like they've lost a part of themselves.

"I think some people have a hard time understanding why we could be grieving this intensely a year and a half later," Saylor said. "Well, get used to it because it's going to go on a long time. Like it could go on forever."

Her particular bad day will be when she is unable to stop herself from crying, wailing hysterically and gasping for breath between her cries.

"That can happen a lot of times when I'm driving and when I'm home alone,"

Saylor said. "And I know that I have to call somebody to come and interrupt that. I can't interrupt it on my own."

After a child's death, simple small talk – like answering the question "How many children do you have?" – becomes difficult.

In the beginning, after Ethan's death, Saylor remembers asking herself "How do I do this?"

When she became pregnant with Ethan, her eldest child, she did research. In essence, she learned how to be a pregnant person and then a young mother.

"For each stage of life, you have to figure out how to be," she said. "And now I had to figure out how to be a person

ADVOCATING IN ETHAN'S NAME

Patti Saylor knows her son Ethan Saylor had more opportunities than people born with Down syndrome 50 years ago. She also knows more can be done with the babies being born now with Down syndrome. Seeing their newborn and toddler photos pop up every day in her Facebook feed gives her motivation, Saylor said.

"If I can just continue to do more so that those babies who are a year or two old don't face the same discrimination, then the next generation can take over," she said. "It takes lifetimes to move these things, so I'm going to give it the rest of mine."

GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION

Gov. Martin O'Malley created the Maryland Commission for Effective

Community Inclusion of Individuals with Intellectual and Development Disabilities in response to Ethan Saylor's death.

The commission aims to improve first responder training and will recommend statewide training standards. An initial report was released Jan. 9, 2014, which would have been Ethan Saylor's 27th birthday. An annual report, including information from sessions held across the state, is due in December.

ETHAN'S LAW WORK GROUP

This group of disability advocates in Maryland and Washington, D.C., is looking to mandate first-responder training by passing "Ethan's Law" during the Maryland General Assembly's 2015 session.

SENATE HEARING

In April, Patti Saylor testified about Ethan's death before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights. She was invited to speak by Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., who chaired the hearing titled "Law Enforcement Responses to Disabled Americans: Promising Approaches for Protecting Public Safety."

DISABILITY RESPONSE TEAM

Saylor is a member of The Arc Maryland's Disability Response Team, which received a grant from the National Center for Criminal Justice and Disability to help train multi-disciplinary teams to respond to criminal justice issues involving people with disabilities

RAISING FUNDS FOR FUN MEMORIES

After her daughters died, Chrissi Lillard said her family needed to focus on something happy to remember them by. "Sophie and Madigan's Playground" was born.

But a playground is only part of the family's vision, which includes a 10-acre park with a butterfly garden and other amenities where families who have experienced loss can come to create new memories.

"It's not just about us. It is about affecting other families' lives and hoping that through our girls we help other families ... take the time and make memories," Chrissi said.

Several fundraising events and activities are planned to raise money for the registered non-profit organization.

KIDSTOCK

The Lillards' biggest fundraiser of the summer will be Sophie & Madigan's Kidstock, Aug. 9 at the Frederick fairgrounds.

The music and arts festival will feature local and national musicians, including Disney's Imagination Movers.

Thousands of tickets are expected to be sold for the event.

SWEET SATURDAY

At Charm City Cakes in Baltimore, students can fundraise and roll fondant at the same.

The \$150 per person class is scheduled for July 12 and students will leave with a 6-inch carousel-inspired cake.

BUTTERFLY GALA

Sophie & Madigan's Painted Butterfly Gala and Silent Auction will include 50 butterfly sculptures painted by children and families.

The creations will be auctioned July 19 at Surreybrooke Garden Center in Middletown.

PAINT THE PARK PINK

On July 26, the Lillards and friends will fill Harry Grove Stadium with their pink running shirts to cheer on big sister Morgan as she throws out the first pitch at a Frederick Keys game. Tickets for the game cost \$9 and proceeds benefit the playground.

that wasn't actively Ethan's mom. My life was defined by him."

"You are still actively Ethan's mom," Lillard said. "You just don't get as many benefits."

Certain realizations are hard, like realizing there won't be any new photos to add to albums or new anecdotes to tell at family gatherings.

"There are no new pictures. There are no new stories. That's just not fair," Saylor said, remembering back to a Facebook conversation she and Lillard had a few weeks ago about the very topic.

"I want to see them growing up beside their sisters. I want them to have held their brother," Lillard wrote, referring to Mason, the family's first boy born in October. She didn't know it, but she was pregnant with him the night of the fire. "I want to have pictures of them sitting on their dad's lap. Seems irrationally hard to keep moving forward and watching the gap grow."

CARRYING ON THE MEMORIES

The women said it helps them to cope when they can focus their attention on legacies for their children. For Saylor, that's Ethan's Law promoting increased police training. For Lillard, it's Sophie and Madigan's Playground, a 10-acre park and memorial garden in Frederick.

"The important part for me is that they don't become forgotten," Lillard said.

Saylor wears a silver necklace engraved with "I love you my mom" in Ethan's handwriting. Lillard wears two hearts — one for each girl in the same color scheme as the nonprofit founded in their honor.

In February, Saylor and her daughter, Emma, traveled to Disney World with a



Staff photo by Graham Cullen

Chrissi Lillard gets ready for a balloon release honoring Sophie and Madigan Lillard.

group that was running the Disney Princess Half-Marathon in honor of Sophie and Madigan. Jack and Chrissi Lillard, along with a bevy of friends and family, started running after the fire, as a way to cope with stress.

Saylor went to one of the big group gatherings while they were in Florida.

"She held my hand while I bawled my eyes out there," Lillard said.

There were more tears on marathon day, as Lillard crossed the finish line, arm and arm with two friends, the last three finishers.

Minnie, Mickey and Goofy walked alongside them as confetti rained down.

"You're an inspiration to all of us," the announcer said, telling the crowd the Lillards' story.

"This is what bravery looks like!"

Saylor wrote, sharing a photo on Facebook. "Chrissi Lillard running the Disney Princess Marathon in honor of her babies, Sophie and Madigan! Friends don't let friends endure pain alone! Way to go Princesses!"

More than 100 runners were on the

Sophie and Madigan's Playground team, including friends who had been made after the girls' loss.

"At first, there were so many people we didn't know reaching out to us, but they've all gone on to become friends, or they've helped in some way," Lillard said. "It's gone from having hundreds of strangers to having hundreds of friends."

Saylor said being cast into the spotlight was difficult for her family in the beginning. As an extrovert, it was easier for her, she said.

"How surreal it was to have all the reporters and the video people and the camera men in our living room, but we were so committed to this," Saylor said. "We have to go through this. This is part of it. This is what we have to do."

People ask Saylor all the time if staying involved in her work with people who have disabilities and Down syndrome, in particular, causes more pain or not.

Would she be able to move forward more easily if she put aside that work, or the advocacy efforts?

"The answer is a definite no," Saylor said. "The grief is going to be the grief, no matter what. I'm so committed to change for other people like Ethan, that the world be a better place. There's just never a question for me."

For many of the people in their lives, outlooks are changed forever.

Saylor and Lillard would give up everything — even to relive the most stubborn moments.

"I might complain about it," Saylor said, "but I would take it back in a heart beat."

"Because," Lillard finished her sentence again, "that's life."

Thursday, March 3, 2011; T17

WATER TOWER TO GET A MAKEOVER



By Danielle E. Gaines
The Gazette

Darnestown resident David Hsu enjoys a special sensation each time he sees the Earth rise over the horizon as he drives along Route 118 near Germantown.

"It's just one of those feelings," he said. "What a cool thing to have."

Hsu was referring to a Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission water tank, which doubles as a 100-foot scale model of the world, on the Germantown campus of Montgomery College.

The landmark has been featured in roadside guidebooks and on Web sites devoted to unique water towers. Water tower engineers dubbed it "Earthoid."

The 2 million-gallon tank soon will get a makeover - or a new face. The 33-year-old sphere might be repainted as a globe or possibly a baseball.

WSSC sent out a request for bids in November and will vote on a contractor March 16, said John White, the utility's public affairs manager. WSSC will not choose the painted design until April, White said.

The pending contract requires bidders to blast clean the interior wet surfaces, paint them white, blast clean the exterior surfaces and replace the exterior painting with a replication of the current globe or a new baseball pattern, according to PaintSquare.com, a daily e-newsletter devoted to protective and marine coatings news and technology.

White said he could not give specifics on the bids or provide copies of the proposals before the board meeting.

Brian Churray, product manager at Paint BidTracker, a service that monitors contract opportunities in the industrial painting industry, said WSSC received six bids for the project, with cost estimates from \$758,000 to \$1.4 million. Further details were not available.

Earthoid was built in the late 1970s to increase water pressure for the growing Germantown area. The tank's design was settled after months of wrangling between WSSC and Montgomery County officials.

The tank was heralded as a landmark project in the water storage and steel plate structures industries, according to structural engineer Stephen W. Meier's biography at Industry Tank Consultants, where he works. He had been tasked with making the tank while at Chicago Bridge and Iron Industries in 1978.

"It was a very new and challenging thing," Meier said in a recent phone interview. "It's not a very practical shape in terms of a support system."

The shape was made possible using internal support columns and false panels, Meier said. The tank's only visible support is an eight-foot-tall base pillar.

Earthoid won the Steel Tank of the Year award in 1980 from the Steel Plate Fabricators Association.

It took Meier two months to finish the engineering design, which was less time than the three months it took to paint.

"You could work all morning to paint the Pacific Ocean, and you'd come down for lunch and it would be just this tiny blue dot," said Peter Freudenberg, 67, who led the team that painted the view-from-space mural in the summer of 1980. He is now retired and lives in Florida.

To create the scale model of Earth, Freudenberg started with a National Geographic globe. He created a model by drawing the seams of the tower's steel plates onto the globe. He then drew each panel to scale in a notebook. As he and his team of four painters rotated around the 100-foot-tall globe on an elevated dolly on wheels, they used colored ropes hanging from the top as guides, Freudenberg said.

Most of the globe's clouds replicate satellite photos he got from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

A hurricane bearing down on Mexico is real, but the clouds over Russia and China are made up. NOAA either could not or would not provide satellite photos of those countries, Freudenberg said.

He kept some of the NOAA photos, along with pictures of his painted version.

"You can't tell which is the real photo and which is the painting," Freudenberg said. "I was very proud of that."

Mothers find strength in Heroin Action Coalition

Parents of addicts encourage one another, share, grieve

By **DANIELLE E. GAINES**

dgaines@newspost.com

Each Tuesday night in a small conference room at the nondescript Crossroads Center near the point where South and Jefferson streets meet in Frederick, a group of women find strength in one another.

In this room, they share, grieve and encourage, all in an attempt to lift the burden imposed on their lives by heroin abuse. The group, to this point all mothers of addicts, understands the unique fear that strikes when an addicted child turns off his or her phone, leaves home after a fight erupts or evades even the most basic questions.

"To be the parent of an addict is excruciating and exhausting. And trying to get them help is excruciating and exhausting," said Beth Schmidt, wearing a black sweatshirt emblazoned with "I hate heroin" in hot pink letters.

The Heroin Action Coalition's peer family support group has been meeting at Crossroads since May, though it started under a

(See **HEROIN** A7)



Staff photo by Sam Yu

Four mothers who recently formed the Heroin Action Coalition are, from left, Lisa Lowe, president; Tina Canter; Beth Schmidt, treasurer; and Carin Miller, secretary.

Heroin

(Continued from A1)

different name.

The Heroin Action Coalition, in its current form, is a collective of other small organizations started by mothers across the state. The group seeks to ensure that appropriate opiate addiction treatment is available to all who request it or need it without regard for that person's income or insurance coverage.

The need is real, said founder Lisa Lowe, who struggled for years to secure treatment for her son, a recovering addict.

Since 2007, heroin or prescription opioid drugs have been involved in the majority of the state's overdose deaths. More than 2,100 people have died from overdose of heroin or opioids since May 2007, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

After grief, sharing help

Schmidt's son, Sean, is among those who have died.

He died in December 2013, two days after his 23rd birthday, from an accidental overdose.

Schmidt, who is from Sykesville, carries around a list with her of other young people who have died and speaks regularly at awareness events, but that doesn't mean she's immune from breaking down from time to time when discussing Sean's death.

She didn't have any resources when she first found out her son was addicted, so she started a Facebook group.

"I wanted to be that voice for the other parents. The things that I was learning, I wanted to get out in the public. Had I known what I know now, I might have done things differently," she said.

For example, Schmidt was once turned away from a treatment facility after telling them Sean had used heroin for only four months; the facility said they had others waiting to get in who'd suffered longer. But Schmidt learned later that Sean had lied about how long he'd been using the drug to avoid hurting her more, she said.

Eventually, Sean would gain admission to a 28-day inpatient program, but that success was short-lived.

"He worked it like he was fighting for his life," Schmidt said. "And evidently he worked it too hard because after 11 days, he was sent home."

The program — and the family's insurance company — simply said it was time for him to go.

That, Schmidt said, is evidence that Maryland's treatment programs need an overhaul.

Lowe and other mothers who are members of the coalition say they've also struggled to secure adequate treatment for their children.

Tina Canter, a group member from Frederick, said her family sent her son to a treatment program in Florida after running into closed doors here.

Lowe first became aware of her son's struggle with substance use disorder when he was a teenager. With about 100 beds available for adolescent treatment in Maryland, "I couldn't get him into treatment."

"As a mother of a child with an often-fatal mental health disorder, I was appalled that I could not find treatment for my son," Lowe said. "If he had cancer, or any other disease, he would get the care and it wouldn't matter how much money I had or what kind of insurance I had."

Pushing policy

Given the still-increasing numbers of overdose deaths, coalition members say the state needs to focus funding to add residential treatment facilities, particularly for the treatment of adolescents.

The group also wants the state to bolster performance measures for treatment programs, create uniform treatment standards and increase oversight of rehabilitation centers.

An 11-point policy agenda created by the group is being circulated to lawmakers.

Last year, advocates worked to pass two pieces of legislation, which created a certification program for the anti-overdose drug naloxone and protected witnesses of an overdose from criminal prosecution.

This year, they also hope to encourage the state to begin an awareness campaign to end the stigma surrounding addiction and spread information about the naloxone and Good Samaritan programs.

Other areas of focus include strengthening the state's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.

Moving forward

Carin Miller, who helped start the family support group, is pleased to see that it continues to grow and help new families.

The Mount Airy woman's son, who is in recovery, moved to Colorado for a job a few months ago and is doing well, she said.

"He told me the other day how he'd wasted five years in life," Miller said. "He's enjoying the beautiful mountains out there and the beautiful sky."

Now a member of the Heroin Action Coalition board, Miller is hoping to create a smoother path to help and provide services for those who come after her.

"I'm fighting to save my child, but in the long run, I'm fighting to save everyone's child," she said.

The Heroin Action Coalition is now active through chapters in 13 Maryland counties. For more information, visit www.heroinactioncoalition.com.

Follow Danielle E. Gaines on Twitter: @danielleegaines.

March 4, 2008

Napping at work may make good business, health sense

By Danielle Gaines
Columbia News Service

NEW YORK – The room is small and dark, except for a tiny sliver of light showing through the peephole. The scent of a fresh sea breeze tinted with mimosa flowers perfumes the air. The gentle clamor of ocean waves emanates softly from unseen speakers.

Swathed in cashmere blankets, and reclined with their feet above their hearts in a “zero-gravity” mattress chair, the worries of the fiercest urban warriors melt away.

For 20 minutes at least. Then it’s back to work.

Yelo, the company that provides this full-sensory sleep experience, opened in bustling Midtown Manhattan last year, after founder and former marketing executive Nicolas Ronco saw firsthand the effects of too much work and too little sleep.

“I could never really recuperate, so it was really taking a serious toll on my body and my mind and my psyche,” Ronco said. “Instead of drinking coffee and going to happy hours for alcohol and taking sleeping pills or illegal drugs, we offer a place where people can actually find a refuge, an oasis.”

Power naps are becoming the “new coffee break” for many of Ronco’s most loyal clients -- more than 3,200 people have visited in the salon’s first 12 months, shelling out as little as \$12 for a 20-minute snooze. He is scouting locations and hopes to open 500 salons around the world over the next two years.

A growing number of authors, doctors and entrepreneurs are promoting guilt-free daytime naps as studies show both that napping can improve productivity and that Americans are sleeping less and less at night, getting only 6.9 hours on average, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

More and more companies are embracing the trend as well. Google famously offers a massage parlor, where employees can nap and rejuvenate. Pizza Hut has instituted a policy allowing its employees to nap on their breaks, no questions asked. Nike has “relaxation rooms,” equipped with napable furniture. Union Pacific Railroad permits one member per crew to take a 45-minute nap while working, to promote safe and alert train operation.

Though most of the talk about workplace napping is whimsical in tone, there are real benefits. An October 2007 British study found that the anticipation of an afternoon nap lowered blood pressure. Another study last year found that daily siestas decreased the risk of heart disease in more than 23,000 Greeks. And last month, a Harvard study found that 45-minute naps increased some memory performance.

“Employees are napping secretly from other employees, and the employers are too tired to know that it is happening,” said Bill Anthony, director of the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University and a leading napping advocate. “It is an epidemic that we need to start dealing with.”

To spread that message he and his wife, Camille, created National Sleep at Work Day. The holiday celebrates its ninth anniversary this year March 10, the first workday after daylight-saving time.

Bill Anthony argues that most companies could improve productivity, mood and health by simply stating that employees are allowed to nap on breaks and should not fear dismissal or loss of reputation as a result. The Anthonys have published two books on the subject: “The Art of Napping” and “The Art of Napping at Work.” They run an online business, The Napping Company, that offers aids, advice and a survey of workplace napping.

They’ve even conducted surveys they claim demonstrate that 70 percent of workers nap on the job, Bill Anthony said. Most do so in secret; the Anthonys even found that 4 percent of men and 8 percent of women who nap at work catch their Z’s in the last bathroom stall with a toilet paper pillow.

It’s conditions such as these that appear to be driving the growth of the naptime spas such as Yelo and another New York-based company, MetroNaps, which offer employees around the world a more dignified way to catch some workday Z’s.

“We are just trying to get napping as readily accepted as we can,” said Janet Rhew, a MetroNaps employee. “And our company is built for that; the pod can go anywhere.”

The “pod” is actually another white leather, zero-gravity chair, but it is portable and can be installed in any office setting. A dome around the head and earphones with ambient noise provide nappers with privacy.

Copyright © 2008, Chicago Tribune